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ABSTRACT

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Recollections of Significant Adults by Preservice Teachers and Nonteaching Students

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Abstract

A retrospective methodology was used to assess if there are any statistically significant relationships between university students who are in a teacher preparation program or who indicate an interest in becoming a teacher [preservice teachers] compared with those who indicate they are not interested in becoming a teacher [nonteaching students] regarding significant adults recalled while the subjects were in grades K-12. The students are compared across groups and within groups regarding demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and gender as well as the characteristics of the significant adults who are identified. The preferred characteristics of significant teachers are described in some detail. In general, the findings do not support the primary hypothesis that there are significant differences in the frequency and description of significant adults when preservice teachers are compared to nonteaching students. Preservice teachers do select teachers as significant adults, but these findings may have more practical, than statistical, significance. The results, particularly with regard to gender and ethnicity, do provide the basis for drawing useful conclusions which have implications for teacher recruitment and for future research.

Recollections of Significant Adults by Preservice Teachers and Nonteaching Students

Introduction

The central hypothesis guiding this descriptive study is that persons who want to become teachers will demonstrate different patterns of relationships and identify different characteristics of significant adults, especially of teachers, than persons who do not decide to become teachers. The primary purpose of this study is to determine if there are any statistically significant relationships between university students who are in a teacher preparation program or who indicate an interest in becoming a teacher [preservice teachers] compared with those who indicate they are not interested in becoming a teacher [nonteaching students] regarding significant adults recalled while the subjects were in grades K-12. The students are compared across groups and within groups regarding demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and gender as well as according to the characteristics of the significant adults who are identified. In addition to a survey instrument, a semi-structured interview procedure is employed to provide a richer characterization of the preferred characteristics of teachers indicated as significant. Implications for the education of teachers are discussed and suggestions for future research are presented. This study is a portion of a larger study addressing adults' recollections of significant adults in adolescence and childhood in general (Galbo, Demetrulius, Crippen, 1989).

Background

There has always been an interest in enticing top quality persons into the teaching profession. Historically, the availability of those who want to become teachers waxes and wanes depending on various economic and social factors. Presently, there is a growing shortage of teachers in some parts of the country such as California, and there are declining numbers of minority persons who want to teach, in general. These difficulties combine to elicit a strong desire on the part of educators to be more proactive about influencing qualified individuals to become teachers especially persons representing various ethnic minority groups which are underrepresented in the schools.

There is much to be learned about how to influence others to become teachers. Prior to studying the role of teachers as agents of influence, it is helpful to know if teachers are perceived as influential by their students and what characteristics these significant teachers may have that are unique. This knowledge would help to provide a basis for deciding if and what future questions are worth asking. If teachers are selected as significant adults by students who are interested in becoming teachers, then the nature of that influence can be studied to find out how to affect more students to participate in the teaching profession in the future.

The following selected review of the literature addresses what is presently known about role models, significant adults, and teachers as agents of influence. The categories to be presented are: (a) the ways in which role models influence decision making in others, (b) teachers as role models, (c) the importance of significant adults in career decisions, (d) teachers as significant adults, (e) other related factors that may influence a person to become a teacher, and (f) retrospective research methodologies.

Role Models

According to proponents of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1972, 1978) the effects of modeling have a considerable impact on the development of the person being influenced. Bandura (1986) views modeling as a form of reciprocal determinism in which there is a vicarious interaction of the perceiver with the model resulting in modeling stimuli which are processed cognitively and result in the acquisition of selected behaviors.

General influence on career decisions. Stake and Noonan (1985) noted that having a same-sex role model influenced college students' educational and career development, particularly for women. When compared to men, women showed greater increases in confidence and motivation scores when the women had a same-sex role model. These same-sex role models appeared to have more personal relevance to the students than opposite-sex role models. These results reinforce Stake and Granger's (1978) earlier findings.

Teachers as role models. A few researchers have studied the ways in which modeling may influence a person's decision to become a teacher. Fielstra (1955), for example, found that having an influential teacher in the past was ranked as one of the three highest reasons for becoming a teacher; the influence of friends and relatives was also stated as being important; and that approximately fifty percent of the students decided to become teachers before they left high school. Based on a survey questionnaire using a putative list of characteristics, Bergsma and Chu (1981) discovered that the influence of teachers was fairly important in senior university education students' decisions to become teachers. Senior secondary education students rated the influence of past teachers more than senior elementary education students who seemed to decide to become teachers based on their liking of children. Wood (1978) determined that present day students who chose to become teachers appeared to be more altruistic and more likely to be influenced by past teachers.

Significant Adults

The literature regarding the influence of significant others, usually adults, on the career decisions of youths does not directly address the effects of significant adults on the decision of youths to become a teacher. The influence of significant adults on the occupational aspirations of adolescents is discussed because it provides some useful insights regarding the decision to become a teacher. In general, significant adults are often identified as having played a special role in the personal development of youths. A significant other has been defined by Stryker (1967) as follows:

This concept [significant others] represents the recognition that, in a fragmented and differentiated world, not all the persons with whom one interacts have identical or even compatible perspectives, and that, therefore, in order for action to proceed, the individual must give greater weight or priority to the perspectives of certain others. To speak then, of significant others is to say that given others occupy high rank on an "importance continuum for a given individual." (p.377)

In a recent synthesis of the literature of adolescents' perceptions of significant adults, Galbo (1986) indicated that adolescents identify a broad range of significant adults, namely parents, siblings, relatives and nonrelated adults primarily from the school and community. Related adults, particularly parents, are mentioned most frequently as being especially important although nonrelated adults may compose up to one-half of all significant adults identified (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982; Galbo, Demettrulius, Crippen, 1989; Garbarino, Burston, Raber, Russell, & Crouter, 1978; Montemayor & Van Komen, 1980;).

The research literature addressing the extent to which significant adults actually impact the career decisions of young persons suggests that parents have the greatest influence on career decisions made by youths (Haller & Woelfel, 1972; Olsen, 1971) although the influence is often situational (Shade, 1978; Solomon, 1961). The data are less clear regarding the extent to which other related and nonrelated adults influence occupational decisions. Curtis (1974) determined that the influence of these adults tends to be stronger during early adolescence, and then decreases with time. Montemayor and Van Komen (1980) add that, in general, the frequency of contact with adults also decreases as the adolescent becomes older.

Teachers as significant adults. The role of the teacher as a significant adult has received some attention and provides insights into career selection by youths. Based on a selected review of the literature by Galbo (in press), teachers are seldom found to be especially significant for a large portion of adolescents (approximately ten percent of all significant adults). Yet, adolescents who do not identify their present teachers as significant adults are able to recall important teachers from the past. The characteristics of significant teachers which are preferred by adolescents include qualities often associated with close friends such trust.

Other Factors Influencing the Decision to Become a Teacher

Limited data exist regarding other factors which influence the decision of a young person to become a teacher. Page and Page (1984) found that the best factor for discriminating whether high school seniors will consider teaching as a career is simply whether or not other individuals have discussed this possibility with them. These researchers suggest that teacher educators need to realize that many youths who

decide to become teachers make this decision at a relatively young age. For example, forty percent of the students in this study who were interested in teaching reached that decision before fifteen years of age. Strickland, Page, and Page (1986) arrived at similar results.

Summary

The data regarding the influence of role models and significant adults on the decision to become a teacher are not conclusive. The data suggest there is the likelihood that role models do influence a student's decision to become a teacher and the impact of significant adults, especially parents, is likely to be at least similar to that of role models even though many questions are left unanswered. For example, there is the possibility that significant adults may have a different quality of influence on young people than role models because the significant adults are viewed as someone special in the life of a youth. Relationships with significant adults tend to be more personal than those typically described for role models. Another unanswered question addresses the relationship between the degree of intimacy of the relationship and the ability of the adult as an agent of influence. Some overlap between these two data bases is likely since some role models may be identified as significant adults and most significant adults are likely to be role models. Significant adults may, in fact, be a logical extension of role models.

Retrospective Research Methodologies

The validity of the data derived from a methodology employing retrospective research methods has been addressed by only a few researchers. Freeman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Larson (1986) have demonstrated the difference between one's perceptions of events as they occur and one's perceptions of the same event after the occurrence. For researchers utilizing retrospective methodologies a disparity of this kind raises questions of methodological validity. If persons reconstruct past events in light of knowledge of the outcomes of their lives, then their recall may or may not reflect accurately the research variables under investigation. Persons may unconsciously assimilate events of the past, adjust their perceptions through reversal or obscurement, and simply try to make sense of their present by distorting the past. In each of these three cases, contamination of the research data results.

While some researchers view this disparity as an inhibiting factor in the gathering of usable data, others view the interpretative aspect of retrospection as enlightening. Freeman et al. (1986) suggest that such data are able "to inform us about a subtle yet extremely important facet of the process of development" (p. 168). In this view, the research model is interpretative and concerned less with the actuality of experience than with the conceptual evaluation of the subjective structure of one's life story. In Freeman's study of adolescents, the findings suggest that the participants' recollection of the past and the coloring of past events should be viewed as developmental, capable of adding insight into the "ever-widening frame of understanding" as one ages (183). In this context, recollection is seen as facilitating rather than displacing the objectivity of recall as it brings into view a comprehensive perspective.

Given the limited amount and differing views of researchers regarding the methodological weaknesses that generate recall data, the authors chose to employ this methodology. For research concerning the influence of significant others on preservice teachers and their decision to enter teaching as a profession, the possible subjective interpretation of the past is a possibility which must be noted and which must temper the strength of the findings. However, the coloring of the past is likely to affect both the treatment and control groups comparatively and thus give credence to any statistically significant differences that are found between the two groups.

Method

The research questions are: (1) What are the frequency and characteristics of significant adults recalled by preservice teachers or nonteaching students while they were in grades K-12? (2) Are any demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity) of preservice teachers and nonteaching students, singularly or in interaction, related to their perceptions of recalled significant adults? (3) What qualities do preservice teachers and nonteaching students prefer in the significant adults who are recalled? (4) How frequently do preservice teachers and nonteaching students spend time with the significant adults who are recollected from the past? (5) When did preservice teachers and nonteaching students realize that the significant adults were first important to them?

Questionnaire

For the first phase of the study the retrospective data were collected from all participants through the administration of a questionnaire asking them to identify and to measure their perceptions of significant adults. The instrument is a modified form of the Social Relations Questionnaire (SRQ) developed by Blyth et al. (1982) to study adolescents' perceptions of significant others. The instrument defines significant adults as "People you spend time with or do things with, people who like you a lot or who you like a lot or both, people who make important decisions about things in your life, people you go to for advice, or people you would like to be like." The instrument consists of 3 sections: demographic information, a place for listing significant others, and questions about significant others. The questionnaire and interview guide were pilot tested by being administered to 6 students who fit the sample characteristics but who did not take part in the study itself. Based on the students' responses and critiques, appropriate modifications to the instruments were made.

Interviews

After the data were collected from the modified SRQ, students were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed in order to assist in the validation of the questionnaire data and to elaborate on the data collected from the survey instrument. Of the students who agreed to be interviewed, 10% of the total number of volunteers were selected by lot. Because of the small number of minority students in the sample, all minority students who volunteered were interviewed. A semi-structured interview was used with 27 students from the sample. The interviews were conducted with 23 students (7 males and 16 females) who were preservice teachers and 4 (females) who were nonteaching students. Of the seven minorities who volunteered to be interviewed, 4 were preservice teachers and 3 were nonteaching students. The interview data also assisted in establishing the reliability and validity of the data generated by the SRQ by conducting a correlational analysis between the responses on the questionnaire and those provided in the interview.

Sample

Sample of the total group. Data were obtained from 285 students enrolled during Spring, 1988, at a small state university in the West (see Table 1). In the sample 68.77% of the students are female and 31.22% are male. The ethnicity of the students tends to reflect the general population of university students with Caucasians (81.05%) representing the largest group. Other ethnic groups in descending order of representation are: 10.87% Hispanic, 4.56% Asian, 1.75% Black, and 1.05% Native American. The students fall into the following age ranges: 52.63% are 17-25 years old, 14.39% are 26-30 years old, 24.56% are 31-40 years old, 8.07% are 41-60 years old. A larger percentage of female students compared to male students tends to be 31 years of age or older (38.6% females, 19.1% males). Furthermore, 91.3% of the students who are 41-60 years old are female. Hispanic and Asian students generally are younger than Caucasian students. Sixty-eight percent of the Hispanics and 69% of the Asians are 17-25 years old compared to 48% of the Caucasians.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Comparison of sample characteristics of preservice teachers and nonteaching students. The sample includes a stratified random selection from undergraduate and credential programs of 197 (69.12%) students who either plan to enter the teaching profession or are currently enrolled in the credential program (preservice teachers) and 88 (30.88%) students not interested in seeking a teaching credential (nonteaching students). (See Table 1.) Of the 197 preservice teachers approximately 75% plan to teach at the elementary level, 4% at the junior high level, and 21% at the senior high level. For the 88 students who do not plan to teach, the most predominant undergraduate major is business administration (61.36%) followed by relatively equal proportions of students with majors in English, computer science, biological science, psychology, and social science. The academic majors of nonteaching Caucasian students do not predominate in any particular discipline. Hispanic students, however, tend to major in degree programs leading to a teaching credential and business only. Black and Asian students major almost exclusively in business administration. Approximately 18% of the

nonteaching students and 1% of the preservice teachers are enrolled in the university's honors program ($X^2=15.458$, $p<.004$).

Comparisons of the characteristics of the preservice teachers and nonteaching students indicate that age, gender, and ethnicity tend to distinguish the two groups. The nonteaching students tend to be younger as a group than the preservice teachers ($X^2=73.247$, $p<.001$). Of the 88 nonteaching students, 86.36% are between the ages of 17-30 compared to 37.56% of the preservice teachers of the same age. Of the 197 preservice teachers, 44.16% are 31 years of age or older. Males and females are equally represented in the subgroup who do not plan to teach. However, the preservice teachers 77.16% are female and 22.84% are male. Approximately equal numbers of male and female preservice teachers plan to teach junior or senior high school, but female students (87.07%) dominate the group who plan to teach elementary school ($X^2=48.893$, $p<.001$). While the ethnicity of both groups is predominantly Caucasian, ethnic minority students represent 28.4% of the nonteaching students as compared to 13.7% of the preservice teachers. Of the nonteaching students, the largest ethnic group represented is Hispanic (13.6%), followed by Asian (9.1%), Black (4.6%), and Native American (1.14%). The ethnic representation for the preservice teachers is similar to the nonteaching students, but the percentage of preservice teachers who are Asian (2.5%) or Black (.5%) is significantly less ($X^2=18.93$, $p<.01$).

Results

Frequency and Characteristics of Identified Significant Adults.

Mean number of significant adults. The forced range for the number of possible significant adults to be identified in this study is 0-20. This range is deemed to be sufficient based on the findings from a synthesis of research studies compiled by Galbo (1986) in which the mean number of significant others tends to be under 10 when peers are not included. For the total group of college students, the mean, when adjusted to account for missing data, is 5.179 ($s=2.376$). The missing data were the result of students who identified significant adults for whom they did not complete the required data sheets.

Using a one-way ANOVA, no significant difference was found ($F=.953$, $p<.42$) in the mean number of significant adults identified by preservice teachers ($X=5.57$, $s=2.60$) and nonteaching students ($X=5.61$, $s=2.35$). For the other demographic variables only one significant difference was found for the variable of "students' major" ($F=2.092$, $df=11,74$, $p<.03$). For most majors the average number of adults identified ranged from 4.0 to 6.25 with the exception of the English/communications students who identified an average of 9.40 ($s=4.28$) significant adults.

Priority order of significant adults. The students were directed to place in priority order the three most important significant adults of those identified by them on the questionnaire. For the total group the results indicated that parents were ranked the highest (48.50%) almost equally divided between mothers and fathers. The next largest group was comprised of teachers, coaches, and counselors (26.77%). Grandparents constituted 10.6%, adult friends 7.75%, and 4% each for brothers/sisters and aunts/uncles.

When the priority order of the significant adults for the total group was statistically analyzed, parents were ranked more consistently in the top rank while teachers were more consistently ranked in third place ($X^2=17.28$, $p<.001$). When mothers' and fathers' rankings were compared, there was a tendency for mothers to be ranked first with fathers receiving about equal ranking for priority order 1 and 2 ($X^2=18.10$, $p<.001$).

When the preservice teachers were compared to nonteaching students, the priority ordering indicated that preservice teachers identified their mothers as the most significant adult with greater frequency than did nonteaching students whose rankings were generally equally dispersed ($X^2=6.75$, $p<.05$). For fathers, the two groups tended to reverse the ordering of the father's significance. Preservice teachers placed fathers predominantly in second place while the students not planning to teach placed fathers in first order of priority more consistently.

Comparison of Demographic Characteristics of Significant Adults Identified by Preservice Teachers and Nonteaching Students

Chi-square analyses were used to compare the characteristics of the significant adults identified by the nonteaching students and preservice teachers. Because students were able to identify one or more significant adults, the observed frequencies in computing the chi-square values are greater than the number of the students in the sample. As evidenced in Table 2, nonteaching students identified approximately equal numbers of female and male significant adults; overall preservice teachers identified more females (54.38%) than males (45.62%). However, the preservice teachers planning to teach elementary school identified a larger percentage of female significant adults (58.4%) while students interested in teaching at the junior high school level and senior high school level identified a greater number of male significant adults ($X^2=22.067$, $p<.0002$).

Insert Table 2 about here.

Although Caucasian significant adults were predominant in both groups, nonteaching students identified a greater percentage of minority significant adults (20.52%) in contrast to preservice teachers (9.61%) ($X^2=75.667$, $p<.00001$). Preservice teachers interested in elementary and high school teaching identified the largest number of Hispanic significant adults (7%) while teachers who wanted to teach at the junior high school level identified the largest percentage of Asian significant adults (6.45%). Black and Native American significant adults represented the smallest identified minority groups. (See Table 3.)

Insert Table 3 about here.

Table 4 displays data to indicate that no significant differences were found between preservice teachers and nonteaching students in their identification of significant adults who were related to them (parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.). For nonrelated significant adults, the largest group identified by both preservice teachers and nonteaching students alike were K-12 teachers and coaches which represents approximately 60% of the total number of nonrelated significant adults ($X^2=80.238$, $p<.0002$). Preservice teachers in contrast to nonteaching students identified almost twice as many elementary teachers as significant (21% vs 11%), fewer significant high school teachers (26% vs 36%), and more junior high school teachers (8% vs 6%). Coaches were identified as significant almost equally by both groups as were persons with affiliations with religious groups and friend's parents.

Except for students planning to teach elementary school (grades K-6), all other students identified high school teachers as significant in greater numbers (29% vs 37%) than teachers from other grades and coaches. In contrast, preservice teachers indicating an interest in elementary school teaching identified elementary teachers most frequently as significant adults followed closely by high school teachers. (See Table 5.) ($X^2=32.05$, $p<.001$)

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here.

Other demographic characteristics. No differences were found between the two groups with regard to the significant adults' place of residence (in the student's house, neighborhood, city, state, country), age, or reason for spending time with the significant adults.

Qualities of Significant Adults Identified by Preservice Teachers and Nonteaching Students

The 73 different qualities of significant adults which were identified by the students were grouped into categories using logical analyses (Patton, 1980) and revealed generally consistent results for the top eight ranked qualities for both preservice teachers and nonteaching students. These qualities were: caring, honest, supportive, loving, fun, sincere, high expectations, and intelligent. The frequency of their inclusion was statistically different for each group only for the placement of the quality of "loving" ($X^2=28.21$, $p<.001$). Preservice teachers ranked "loving" in third place of importance after "caring" and "supportive" while nonteaching students placed this quality seventh on the list with "honest, caring," and "supportive" as their first three choices.

Interview Results

The primary reasons for conducting interviews were to check the reliability of the data and to add richness to the survey data by further expanding upon students' responses regarding characteristics of teachers who were identified as significant adults. Also, when teachers were not identified as significant, additional information was sought from students in order to understand why teachers were not selected. In order to provide a more detailed image of significant teachers and the fact that the findings were generally consistent between groups, the interview data have been collapsed to reflect the position of all interviewed students instead of preservice teachers and nonteaching students separately. Details for specific subgroups such as preservice teachers interested in elementary or secondary teaching are presented only when the findings provide additional data which assist in clarifying the focus of the study.

The students who indicated an interest in becoming elementary teachers tended to identify elementary teachers as being particularly significant. These important teachers were perceived as liking children and caring about the student as a person. The significant teachers were also described as motivators. The students who wanted to become secondary teachers tended to identify more secondary teachers as significant. These teachers were described as someone to talk to; they were more like a friend. Often the significance was enhanced as a result of connections with the student that extended beyond the classroom as in the case of a club advisor, a coach, or a field trip supervisor. These teachers were also seen as motivators who demonstrated a deep love for their students.

Important characteristics. In general one important characteristic which influenced the students to select specific teachers as significant was "being personal." Being personal included such descriptions as easy to talk to, understanding, willing to listen to what I thought, sensitive, trustworthy, kind, accepting, encouraging, liked children, smiled often, calm, happy, helpful, funny, and treated me in a special way. A second important characteristic was tied to classroom related involvements. The teacher was seen as intelligent, organized, having high standards, supportive, consistent, encouraging, liked their academic discipline, committed to teaching, enthusiastic, and inspiring. A third quality related to being involved with the teacher in a informal capacity in the classroom as well as informally outside of the classroom on fieldtrips, as a spectator at school events, as a friend, as a counselor, as a mentor or a role model, and as someone to talk to during lunch or after school.

The students who were interviewed who did not identify teachers as significant adults stated that teachers were absent from their list because the students' family situation was strong and there was no need to have significant teachers in their lives. For these students this did not mean the teachers were not good at their jobs. In some cases, however, the teachers were not seen as particularly noteworthy. When these students were asked what characteristics stood out among teachers that were important, the list was identical to the ones listed by students who identified teachers as significant. These students indicated that, in general, they would have liked to have a closer relationship with a teacher, more support, better modeling of learning, recognition of improvement, and a more personal manner in dealing with students.

Examples of characteristics. Examples of the important qualities of significant adults were identified by the students during the interview process. For five of the most frequently mentioned qualities two illustrative examples are provided. "Loving" was the the single quality for which there was a statistically significant difference. This quality was described by the students in the following ways: (1) She made me feel special, she loved kids. She listened to you and accepted you the way you were." (2) "He taught students to love learning and interacting with people. You could tell he loved history and being with us."

For the quality of "caring" the following examples were given: (1) "She cared, talked to me after school, and paid special attention to my needs. My grandfather had just died. She helped to make it better." (2) "He was a concerned man. He saw I was a good reader, but was not reading. He provided me with personal books, made a home visit and came to dinner, all because he cared about me."

For the quality of "honesty" the following examples were given: (1) We would all go to games together. I trusted him and knew he would never betray a confidence." (2) "She would go on vacation and my girlfriend and I would take care of her dog. She trusted me because she really loved that dog. She trusted me and I would never do anything to change that."

For the quality of "supportive" the following examples were given: (1) "He taught me that I could do anything that I wanted if I put my mind to it. He made me a lab assistant and supported me all the way." (2) "She was super supportive. She identified that I needed help in reading and encouraged me all the way. She always smiled and never got mad."

For the quality of "high expectations" the following examples were given: (1.) "He had high expectations. He pushed me to be the best I could be, and then challenged me to go further." (2.) "She was determined to have students learn. I remember her because you weren't going to get out of her class unless you learned something. She was difficult, had high expectations, but when you did well, you learned."

Frequency of Present Interaction with Significant Adults

The students responses to the question of frequency of interaction at the present time were collapsed into three categories: seldom, occasionally, and frequently. For preservice teachers the largest percentage (48.6%) of the students indicated that they seldom see (not at all or less than once a year) the significant adult while the largest percentage (60.2%) of nonteaching students interact with the adult frequently (at least once a month or more) ($X^2=83.958$, $p<.00001$).

When Significant Adults Were First Realized As Important.

When students were asked to identify the grade in which they were enrolled when the significant adult was first realized as being important to them, both the preservice teachers and the nonteaching students indicated preschool-grade 3 with greatest frequency (34.8% each). For the preservice teachers the adult's significance was noticed primarily in elementary school encompassing grades from preschool-6 (53.9%), followed by high school (29.5%), and junior high school (16.8%). In comparison to preservice teachers, nonteaching students showed less pronounced differences in percentages between elementary (47.2%) and high school (43.4%) while junior high was similar (9.3%) to the preservice teaching group ($X^2=83.196$, $p<.00001$).

A large majority of both groups indicated that the significant adults who were recalled from the past are still important to them at the present time. However, the percentage of the nonteaching students (74.8%) who indicated significant adults recalled from the past were still important to them now was greater than for preservice teachers (66.2%) ($X^2=14.423$, $p<.006$).

Discussion

The central hypothesis guiding this descriptive study is that persons who want to become teachers will demonstrate different patterns of relationships and identify different characteristics of significant adults, especially teachers, who are perceived as significant than persons who do not decide to become teachers. The primary purpose of the study is to determine if there are any statistically significant relationships between university students who are in a teacher preparation program or who indicate an interest in becoming a teacher [preservice teachers] compared with those who indicate they are not interested in becoming a teacher [nonteaching students] regarding significant adults recalled while the subjects were in grades K-12. The students are compared across groups and within groups regarding demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and gender as well as the characteristics of the significant adults who are identified. After a discussion of the characteristics of the preservice teachers in the sample, the remainder of the discussion follows in the same sequence as the order in which the research questions were originally presented. This section ends with a discussion of the value of the retrospective methodology which was employed in this study. Due to the descriptive nature of this study the following conclusions should not be interpreted as conclusive.

This study is a part of a larger study focusing on the recollections of significant adults in general, and selected data which were found to be statistically significant in the larger study are included in this discussion when those data provide additional insights into the conclusions addressing the research questions proposed herein.

Characteristics of Preservice Teachers

Age. Older preservice teachers in this study tend to be females and the older the preservice teacher, the more likely the preservice teacher is a female. These findings suggest that those females who are interested in becoming teachers are not the stereotypical college graduates who are in their early twenties. Their age indicates that these women are likely to be reentering the work force, first career women, or women undergoing a career change. In any case, the needs of this group as well as what influenced them to become a teacher may be different than younger college graduates.

Gender. Generally, the tendency is for students to choose gender alike significant adults, but females choose males as significant adults more often than male students chose female significant adults. The implications are that males are more likely to prefer role models of the same sex than females. One possible explanation is that after elementary school, the role models which are available to young women may be primarily males. Until recently, males have tended to make up a major part of the work force of junior high and high schools although this disproportionate representation of the genders in the upper grades appears to be changing. On the other hand, males do not tend to choose females as significant adults from the elementary school years. It is possible that gender alike role models are more important for males than females who want to be teachers although Stake and Granger (1976) and Stake and Noonan (1985) suggest that gender alike role models are particularly important for women. A contradiction arises which indicates that much more needs to be learned before the actual importance of another in influencing the decision to select an occupation can be determined.

Preservice teachers who want to teach in elementary schools tend to be female and identified a larger percentage of female significant adults than preservice teachers wanting to teach at other grade levels. Preservice teachers who want to teach elementary school are by far the largest subgroup in the sample. These findings suggest that women continue to be the primary persons interested in elementary school teaching. Also, many of the teachers who are identified as significant are from similar grade levels in which the preservice teachers want to teach. Perhaps the significant teachers provide the impetus for students' future decisions to become teachers at a particular time in the student's life. Further information is necessary to determine if a cause and effect relationship actually exists.

Ethnicity. Nonteaching students tend to select more minority significant adults than preservice teachers. This finding suggests that preservice teachers may not have the same exposure to ethnically different persons, or preservice teachers do not perceive ethnically different persons to be significant in the same way as nonteaching students do. Much more research is needed, but a question arises regarding the limited experiences that future teachers may have had with persons of diverse cultural backgrounds who then are expected to be responsive to a society in which ethnic minorities are becoming the majority of the students in school as is the case in California.

From a wider perspective when all males are compared to all females instead of by occupational preference, males chose more significant adults from ethnic minorities than females who tended to select Caucasian significant adults ($X^2=34.55$, $p<.0001$). Another finding relevant here addresses the size of the school which the subjects attended regardless of occupational preference. As the size of the school increased at the elementary, secondary or high school levels, the percentage of significant adults with an ethnic minority background selected by students also increased (elementary- $X^2=39.264$, $p<.0006$; junior high- $X^2=63.436$, $p<.00001$; high school- $X^2=58.064$, $p<.00001$). Females having ethnic origins other than Caucasian may not have as many school related female significant adults from whom to choose due to the fact that women from nonCaucasian ethnic groups have not selected teaching as a profession, particularly in the upper grades. How gender differences and ethnicity correlate with each other in the selection of school related significant adults needs additional attention.

Each ethnic group of students, except Native Americans who were represented by a very small number of students, identified significant adults from the same ethnic background. Caucasian significant adults were selected second most frequently by minority students ($X^2=97.32$, $p<.0001$). In addition Hispanic and Caucasian students identified teachers and coaches with greater frequency than Black and Asian students ($X^2=24.804$, $p<.0001$). Since a large part of the population still tends to be Caucasian, the potential importance of significant adults from ethnic groups other than one's own, particularly Caucasian,

is an important consideration. More data are needed in order to determine how ethnically alike and ethnically different significant adults influence youths' interest in becoming teachers.

Preference of teaching level. Elementary school was the level preferred most, and junior high school was the least preferred teaching level. This finding suggests that future teachers' perceptions of junior high school continue to be problematic. Junior high has generally received less attention from researchers and teacher educators than either high school or elementary school, and the lack of enthusiasm demonstrated by preservice teachers for teaching at this level continues to be manifest. It appears that prospective teachers continue to seek careers at the more popular grade levels. Ways need to be developed to attract more skilled teachers to the junior high level. Additional knowledge contributing to an understanding of why junior high continues to be perceived as an undesirable place to teach would assist in providing ideas to remedy the situation.

Frequency and Characteristics of Significant Adults

Mean number of significant adults. No significant differences were found between preservice teachers and nonteaching students regarding the mean number of significant adults selected by each group. Previous studies have reached similar conclusions (Blyth et al., 1982; Galbo, 1983; Garbarino, et al., 1978). In addition, no significant differences were found between groups regarding the mean number of related significant adults. These results indicate that the number of significant adults which are identified is not likely to serve as a useful indicator of differences between preservice teachers and nonteaching students. Instead, the number of significant adults identified by a person may be unique to the individual regardless of age, gender, and ethnicity.

Priority order of significant adults. Related to the data illustrating the mean number of significant adults are the data identifying the prioritization of those adults. Having the students place in priority order the three most significant adults showed that parents continue to be the most important significant adults in students' lives. Yet, school related significant adults (teachers, counselors and coaches) made up more than one-quarter of the adults prioritized. This finding suggests that school personnel are some of the most important individuals in the lives of preservice teachers and nonteaching students alike although the ways in which these nonrelated significant adults, specifically teachers, influence the lives of youths are not well understood.

Nonrelated significant adults. Teachers comprised more than one-half of all nonrelated significant adults and one-quarter of all significant adults. Teachers and coaches combined made up sixty percent of the nonrelated adults. Both preservice teachers and nonteaching students selected a large percentage of teachers, but elementary preservice teachers selected twice as many elementary teachers as significant adults as did the nonteaching students. Preservice teachers also recognized that the significant adults were first noticed as important while the subjects were in elementary school which helps corroborate the finding that elementary preservice teachers chose elementary teachers as significant adults. Whether the selection of the elementary teacher as a significant adult and the choice to become an elementary teacher are related is difficult to say. The findings are further confounded by the fact that many of the preservice teachers who are older persons participated in other occupations prior to their decision to become a teacher. These data are contrary to other research which supports the idea that the decision to become a teacher takes place prior to fifteen years of age (Page, et al., 1984; Strickland, et al., 1986).

In addition, the greatest percentage of male significant adults were found in the nonrelated category which included junior high and high school teachers, coaches, and clergy. Female significant adults primarily were parents' friends, friends of parents, and elementary school teachers ($X^2=75.299, p<.0001$). This result suggests that male students are finding the larger portion of their male significant adults outside the home while females are finding their female significant adults mostly as family members and as teachers in elementary school.

Preferred Qualities of Teachers As Significant Adults

The quality of "loving" was found to be a statistically significant finding describing teachers who are identified as significant. Although the interview process was used to uncover the meanings of this and

other terms, additional study would provide insight into the parameters of what "loving" means if other studies reported similar results. It would be interesting to know if this quality indicates a unique aspect in the personality of teachers who are identified as being special to students. Other questions present themselves. Does this quality of "loving" impact the student in a way which influences them to become a teacher? Does the quality of "loving" differentiate between teachers who prefer elementary school teaching as opposed to secondary school? Can the quality of "loving" or any other quality actually be taught to prospective teachers, or are these qualities central the character of the individuals as a result of their upbringing?

Reasons for Spending Time with Significant Adults

There were no significant differences between preservice teachers and nonteaching students regarding the reasons for spending time with significant adults. The differences which did arise were between other subgroups in the sample. For example, male students like to spend time with significant adults who have "similar interests" to the students while female students more frequently chose significant adults who "accepted you as you were" ($X^2=22.859$, $p<.0004$). Male significant adults were most frequently sought out in order "to do things together" ($X^2=34.444$, $p<.00001$). These findings indicate that students have different reasons for seeking out significant adults which tend to be consistent along gender lines. How this knowledge could be used to influence others to become teachers is not clear and needs additional study.

When Adult's Significance Was First Noticed

Preservice teachers and nonteaching students both indicated that significant adults were first noticed as important to them while in preschool to grade three. This finding is not unexpected since parents are part of this group of significant adults and elementary teachers also make up a large portion of the significant adults identified. What is of interest is that many of the preservice teachers who wanted to become elementary teachers chose elementary teachers as significant. No cause and effect relationship can be made, but preservice teachers who want to teach elementary school show a preference for significant elementary teachers. A similar preference was noted for preservice teachers who wanted to teach at the junior high and high school levels. Additional research would be useful in offering some explanation of the way these preferences translate into the eventual decision to become a teacher.

Present importance of significant adults. Nearly one-half of the preservice teachers seldom see their significant adults while 60% of the nonteaching students see the adults frequently. Considering that most of the preservice teachers are female and most of their significant adults tend to reside in the same house ($X^2=12.569$, $p<.03$), this apparent discrepancy is not easily explained. Perhaps, since the female preservice teachers are generally older and the significant teachers who are recalled are from the elementary school years, these significant adults may be deceased or the preservice teacher may have moved so that access to the adult is no longer feasible.

Summary. Generally speaking, the data do not support the hypothesis that preservice teachers identify different patterns of relationships with significant adults or prefer different characteristics of significant adults when compared to nonteaching students. Also, the pattern of selection of teachers as significant adults and the preferred teachers' characteristics are similar between the two groups. These findings should not be interpreted to mean that the teacher has no influence on another's decision to become a teacher.

The descriptive data suggest a few clues regarding the nature of significant teachers' influence on the decision to become a teacher on which to speculate. The pattern of selecting significant adults based on gender and ethnic background reinforces the common knowledge that these factors are important to certain persons, but significant adults who are ethnically different are also selected. This is important to know because the possibility of providing role models of similar backgrounds to all students is an ideal still to be realized, may not always be possible, and still may have results.

These findings, also, suggest that classroom teachers may have an impact on the decision to become a teacher as early as the elementary school grades and continuing on through high school. More information is needed to determine how that influence actually functions or if it in fact exists.

Retrospective Methodologies

The methodology employed here required that university students identify significant adults recalled from the past while the subjects were in grades K-12. Although some questions have been raised regarding the usefulness of retrospective methodologies, the authors found particular advantages in its utilization. In general, the findings generated through the use of retrospection appear to be very similar to studies of adolescents where no long term recall was required. Findings such as the mean numbers of significant adults, patterns of relationship, and qualities desired of significant adults are generally consistent with other studies (Blyth et al., 1982; Galbo, 1983; Garbarino et al., 1978). The impression of the authors is that the data provided through the interview process was more descriptive and illuminating than what is generally attainable from younger subjects. More precise explanations were given regarding why teachers were and were not chosen as significant, and more detailed explanations were provided regarding the qualities perceived to be important in significant teachers.

The primary finding which differed from previous studies was the extent to which teachers were identified as significant adults. Galbo (in press) found in his review of the literature that the percentage of teachers identified as significant generally was generally 10% of all significant adults identified with a few studies indicating higher percentages. In the study reported here, the percentage of teachers as significant adults was approximately one-half of all significant adults reported and nearly one-third of the nonrelated adults. The reason for this improved view of teachers as significant adults may be the result of a change in the students' perceptions due to the passage of time and the gaining of a more balanced perspective that often comes with growing older. One finding suggests a modification of students' perceptions may, in fact, have taken place. Even though the greater percentage of subjects wanted to become teachers which might explain the large number of teachers being chosen as significant adults, the nonteaching students selected teachers at even a higher rate than the preservice teachers. Consequently, the imbalance of preservice teachers as subjects does not account for the high number of significant teachers selected by both groups.

Implications

Intervention Strategies for Teacher Recruitment

This section will present possible strategies to consider for the recruitment of new teachers. Due to the descriptive nature of this study, these ideas should not be considered as conclusive, but instead, the suggestions are more speculative in nature and the result of the authors' close experience with the data.

Importance of teachers' behaviors and qualities. This study identified a variety of behaviors and qualities which were preferred in teachers who were identified as significant adults. In a practical sense these attributes are like those characteristics which are desired in close friends and family members. How the decision is made by a student to become a teacher and the role the attributes of the significant teacher may play is not understood. Perhaps, the answer resides in the way the teacher embodies certain qualities with which the student identifies. Consequently, teachers who are interested in increasing the chances that students will become teachers might share their experiences and attitudes regarding teaching with students in appropriate situations. This sharing along with the demonstration of other qualities students think are important in significant teachers may provide the basis for students to decide to become teachers in the future.

Teachers are the most frequently selected nonrelated significant adults identified by preservice teachers. Given this perceived importance of teachers, the relationship of the students with classroom teachers appears to be an ideal situation in which to advocate the value of teaching. The question is whether or not the classroom teacher feels any responsibility to talk to students about teaching as a career. Page and Page (1984) suggest that simply talking to students about becoming a teacher discriminates between whether students will or will not consider teaching as a career. Consequently, the potential impact of a significant adult on a student's decisions and the potential value of a discussion between the student and teacher about teaching appear to be a strong combination to consider especially if the influencing takes place prior to departure from high school. Further research might focus on the effects of teachers who

openly advocate the importance of teaching as a career or school related programs or clubs which focus on the teaching profession.

Increasing teacher diversity in the teaching profession. Ethnic minorities appear to select significant adults first who have a similar ethnic background, but Caucasian significant adults are chosen second most frequently. This finding suggests that to influence another to become a teacher, the preference would be to develop role models and significant others within the school context which reflect the ethnic makeup of the student population. Given the distribution of different ethnic groups in the United States and the lack of a balanced representation of minorities in the teacher workforce, the ethnic makeup of the faculty often does not reflect the student population. Since significant adults are identified by students across ethnic lines, it would appear that, at least in some cases, adults who are ethnically different than their students do function effectively as significant adults. Studying these relationships across ethnic lines and how these adults influence a student's decision to become a teacher might provide useful insights for the recruitment of minority teachers. More importantly, the value of ethnically similar role models should not overshadow the need for greater sensitivity on the part of all educators to be available as a role model or significant other for any child who has the need to enter into such a relationship.

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Table 1

Student Characteristics

	Total		Preservice Teachers		Nonteaching Students	
	(n=285)		(n=197)		(n=88)	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Students' Career Plans						
Elementary Teaching	147	51.58	147	74.62	0	0.00
Junior High Teaching	8	2.81	8	4.06	0	0.00
High School Teaching	42	14.74	42	21.32	0	0.00
No plans to teach	88	30.88	0	0.00	88	100.00
Students' Ages						
17-25	150	52.63	74	37.56	76	86.36
26-30	41	14.39	35	17.77	6	6.81
31-40	70	24.56	66	33.50	4	4.55
41-60	23	8.07	21	10.66	2	2.27
Students' Sex						
Female	196	68.77	152	77.16	44	50.00
Male	89	31.22	45	22.84	44	50.00

(table continues)

Table 1

Student Characteristics

	Total		Preservice Teachers		Nonteaching Students	
	(n=285)		(n=197)		(n=88)	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Students' Ethnicity</u>						
Asian	13	4.56	5	2.54	8	9.09
American Indian	3	1.05	2	1.02	1	1.14
Black	5	1.75	1	0.51	4	4.55
Caucasian	231	81.05	170	86.29	61	69.32
Hispanic	31	10.87	19	9.64	12	13.64
Others/unidentified	2	.70	0	0.00	2	2.27
<u>Type of Student</u>						
Honor	18	6.32	2	1.02	16	18.18
Regular	267	93.68	195	98.98	72	81.82

When n does not equal 100%, the data provided by students were incomplete.

Table 2

Students' Identification of the Gender of Significant Adults

	Preservice Teacher Subgroups			Preservice Teachers	Nonteaching Students	Total
	Elem	JrHigh	Sec			
Male	315	17	137	469	218	687
	41.67%	53.13%	57.32%	45.62%	50.82%	47.15%
Female	442	15	102	559	211	770
	58.47%	46.88%	42.68%	54.38%	49.18%	52.85%
TOTAL	756	32	239	1028	429	1457
n=1476 because of missing data.						

Table 3

Students' Identification of the Ethnicity of Significant Adults

	Preservice Teacher Subgroups			Preservice Teachers	Nonteaching Students	Total
	Elem	JrHigh	Sec			
Asian	7 .93%	2 6.45%	5 2.13%	14 1.37%	27 6.37%	41 2.83%
American Indian	4 .53%	0 .00%	2 .85%	6 .59%	5 1.18%	11 .76%
Black	10 1.33%	0 .00%	1 .43%	11 1.08%	20 4.72%	31 2.14%
Caucasian	682 90.45%	28 90.32%	212 90.21%	922 90.39%	337 79.48%	1259 86.77%
Hispanic	51 6.76%	1 3.23%	15 6.38%	67 6.57%	35 8.25%	102 7.03%
TOTAL	754	31	235	1020	424	1451

n=1476 because of missing data.

Table 4

Students' Identification of Related Significant Adults

	Preservice Teacher Subgroups			Preservice Teachers	Nonteaching Students	Total
	Elem	JrHigh	Sec			
Mother	116	3	31	150	64	214
	28.57%	27.27%	32.29%	29.24%	30.62%	29.59%
Father	104	4	29	137	56	193
	25.62%	36.36%	30.21%	26.71%	26.79%	26.69%
Grandparents	95	2	21	118	27	145
	23.40%	18.18%	21.88%	23.00%	12.92%	20.06%
Aunt/Uncle	45	1	9	55	20	75
	11.08%	9.09%	9.38%	10.72%	9.57%	10.37%
Brother/Sister	29	1	4	34	28	62
	7.14%	9.09%	4.17%	6.63%	13.40%	8.58%
Other Relatives	17	0	2	19	14	33
	4.19%	0.00%	2.08%	3.70%	6.70%	4.56%
TOTAL	406	11	96	513	209	723

Table 5

Students' Identification of Non-Related Significant Adults

	Preservice Teacher Subgroups			Preservice	Nonteaching	Total
	Elem	JrHigh	Sec	Teachers	Students	
Elem. Teacher	85	2	22	109	26	135
	23.29%	9.52%	15.49%	20.64%	11.30%	17.76%
Jr High Teacher	28	4	11	43	13	56
	7.67%	19.05%	7.75%	8.14%	5.65%	7.37%
Secondary Teacher	81	6	52	139	83	222
	22.19%	24.57%	36.63%	26.33%	36.09%	29.21%
Coach	13	2	13	28	13	41
	3.56%	9.52%	9.15%	5.30%	5.65%	5.39%
Minister/Priest	28	1	6	35	13	49
	7.67%	4.76%	4.23%	6.63%	5.65%	6.45%
Friend's Parent	20	1	4	25	9	34
	5.48%	4.76%	2.82%	4.73%	3.91%	4.47%
Parent's Friend	33	1	10	44	9	53
	9.04%	4.76%	7.04%	8.33%	3.91%	6.97%
Other	77	4	24	105	64	167
	21.10%	19.05%	16.90%	19.89%	27.83%	21.97%
TOTAL	365	21	142	528	24 230	760